

United States Senate

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October 21, 2008

Dr. John E. Niederhuber
Director, National Cancer Institute
U.S. National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Niederhuber:

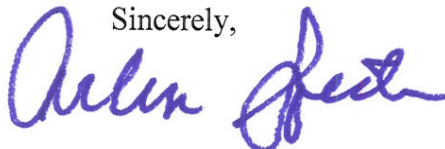
The residents of Carbon, Luzerne and Schuylkill Counties in Pennsylvania have noted for several years what appeared to be elevated rates of certain cancers and blood disorders in their communities. At my urging, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registries within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention investigated the incidence of polycythemia vera in this area. They have concluded that the suspicions of the residents were accurate and that the incidence of polycythemia vera in these areas is indeed significantly higher than expected.

On Monday October 6, 2008 I convened a roundtable in Hazleton, Pennsylvania with residents, doctors, and health officials regarding the region's health problems. Based on the information I learned at that meeting, I strongly urge the National Cancer Institute make funds available to study the basic biology of polycythemia vera and related conditions as arising in this cluster, including studies comparing patients from the cluster's area with patients from outside of the area. The McAdoo, Pennsylvania cluster may provide a unique opportunity to delve into the pathogenesis of this disease.

In addition, it is my understanding that few treatments are available for early stage myeloproliferative syndromes, such as polycythemia vera. Many of the patients involved in the Pennsylvania cluster have expressed an interest in having their tissue banked and participating in clinical trials. What efforts regarding polycythemia vera and related diseases is the National Cancer Institute supporting and what more should be done? How can the occurrence of this cluster of cases in Pennsylvania be used to advance our understanding of this disease and bring us closer to preventing or curing the disease?

Thank you for your attention to these matters. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Arlen Specter